

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-07 /063 W

-----160707Z 014619 /17

P R 160201Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7229

INFO AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 3021

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MY

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE GENERAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 2929 (NOTAL)

B. STATE 103775 (NOTAL)

C. KUALA LUPUR A-44, APRIL 11, 1977

D. KUALA LUMPUR 0713

1. SUMMARY: SPECULATION VARIES AS TO TIMING OF NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS, BUT WE CONSIDER IT UNLIKELY THEY WILL BE HELD BEFORE THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF 1978 AT THE VERY EARLIEST. END SUMMARY.

2. REF B REQUESTED EMBASSY COMMENTS ON GENERAL ELECTION TIMING, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF UMNO LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS. ALTHOUGH OUR READING AT THIS TIME IS FAR FROM DEFINITIVE, NUMEROUS FACTORS BEAR ON THIS SUBJECT. OVERT REASONS GIVEN FOR HOLDING ELECTIONS SOONER THAN FIVE YEARS AFTER LAST GENERAL ELECTIONS (E.G. AUGUST, 1979) VARY, RANGING FROM SUPERSTITIOUS ARGUMENT FOR AVOIDING ELECTIONS ON TEN-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF ILL-FATED 1969 ELECTIONS TO MORE PRACTICAL ONE OF NOT BEING SURE THAT THE ECONOMY; WHICH CURRENTLY

IS IN GOOD SHAPE, WILL NOT BE IN DECLINE BY 1979. OTHERS CONTEND PRIME MINISTER/ACTING UMNO
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PRESIDENT HUSSEIN ONN NEEDS FRESH POPULAR MANDATE IN ADVANCE OF 1978 UMNO ELECTIONS (SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE AT THE ANNUAL PARTY CONVENTION IN LATE JUNE-EARLY JULY) IN ORDER TO SOLIDIFY HIS HOLD ON THE PARTY.

THERE ALSO IS THE UNSTATED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPERATIVE OF A DIVERSE, NON-IDEOLOGICAL MASS PARTY NEEDING PERIODIC ELECTIONS TO HOLD IT TOGETHER, AS OTHERWISE IT IS LIKELY TO BE RENT WITH

FACTIONAL BICKERING AS IS THE PRESENT CASE WITH UMNO. ADDITIONALLY, THERE IS THE SIMILARLY UNSTATED BUT IMPLICIT VIEW THAT ELECTIONS ARE TIMELY FROM THE SIMPLE POINT OF VIEW OF CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES DERIVING PRIMARILY FROM LATE PRIME MINISTER TUN RAZZAK'S DEATH AND HIS SUCCESSOR'S MARKEDLY DIFFERENT POLITICAL CHARACTER AND STYLE.

3. AS CITED IN THE APRIL 11 STAR LEAD ARTICLE ON ELECTIONS FEVER (REF C), THE SUBJECT OF "IMMINENT" ELECTIONS INDEED PERMEATES THE LOCAL POLITICAL SCENE. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THIS ARTICLE WAS A "TRIAL BALLOON" BY THE STAR'S NEWS EDITOR TO TRY TO FLUSH OUT THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE IN VIEW OF CONTRADICTORY STATEMENTS ON ELECTIONS BY GOM SPOKESMEN. DESPITE EVIDENCE PARTIES ARE DUSTING OFF ELECTION CONCINGENCY PLANS AND STEPPING UP VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES, WE BELIEVE "IMMINENT" MEANS WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR BUT NOT REPEAT NOT THIS YEAR IN VIEW OF SCHEDULING CONFLICTS, WEATHER CONSIDERATIONS, AND THE SIMPLE MECHANICAL CHORES INVOLVED IN CONDUCTING NATIONAL ELECTIONS (E.G., VERIFYING ELECTOR ROSTERS, PRINGING BALLOTS, ETC.).

4. PROCEDURALLY, ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION, ELECTIONS MUST BE HELD WITHIN 60 DAYS AFTER THE KING, ACTING ON THE ADVICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT. IN 1974 THE ELECTION COMMISSION ANNOUNCED JULY 31 PARLIAMENT HAD BEEN DISSOLVED AS OF THAT DATE, NOMINATION FILING DATE WAS AUGUST 8, AND ELECTIONS TOOK PLACE AUGUST 24 IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA. (FOR ADDITIONAL USEFUL BACKGROUND SEE KUALA LUMPUR A-26 OF MARCH 11, 1974, AND SUBSEQUENT ELECTION REPORTING.)
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5. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE EARLIEST FEASIBLE TIME FOR THIS WOULD BE THE FIRST QUARTER OF NEXT YEAR. HOWEVER, NO ONE WE KNOW OF HAS ANY INSIGHTS INTO THE PRIME MINISTER'S MIND, AND HE IS THE PERSON WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT.
DILLON

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